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SUBJECT: EUR PDAS VOLKER'S FEBRUARY 3 MEETING WITH FRENCH
MOD ADVISERS

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: French MOD Diplomatic Adviser Besancenot and deputy Grand gave EUR PDAS Volker February 3 a preview of the points that MOD Alliot-Marie planned to make at the Annual Security Conference in Germany the following day and at the NATO Informal Defense Ministerial at Taormina February 9-10. He elaborated on French unease with NATO's growing role and alleged divergence from its primary functions of ensuring European stability (in the Balkans) and fighting against terrorism (in Afghanistan). He feared that U.S. support for the NATO Response Force (NRF) was superficial compared to French engagement. Besancenot aired French complaints that NATO's common funding structure provides disincentives to contributing states. On the DOD troop drawdown in Afghanistan announced December 20, 2005 (the subject of an exchange of letters between Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and French Defense Minister Alliot-Marie), Grand explained that the French were not questioning U.S. commitment to Afghanistan so much as the timing of the DOD announcement, which sent an ambiguous and troubling message to allies. End summary.

¶2. (C) EUR PDAS Kurt Volker, on a trip with Deputy Secretary Robert Zoellick en route to the Annual Security Conference held in Germany, met with French Diplomatic Adviser on International Affairs to the Minister of Defense, Bertrand Besancenot and his deputy, Camille Grand, on February 3. Accompanying were U.S. Embassy Political Minister-Counselor and PolMil officer (notetaker).

The French and NATO

¶3. (C) Besancenot said that Alliot-Marie would follow up at Munich on the theme of President Bush's speech of last February in support of a strong Europe and make proposals for injecting substance into the U.S.-EU relationship. Alliot-Marie, according to Besancenot, would take care not to make inflammatory comments publicly at the Wehrkunde. However, at the Informal NATO Ministerial to be held in Taormina February 9-10, she planned to be frank about France's position concerning NATO's future direction.

¶4. (C) Besancenot said the NATO-EU relationship should not be built at the expense of a healthy U.S.-EU relationship. NATO should neither be strengthened at the expense of other institutions in need of reform ("the UN has real problems, but the response should be to repair the UN system") nor at the expense of international mechanisms that are being developed or already exist ("the EU and AU have mechanisms in place that allow them to equip, train, etc., there is no need to duplicate this at NATO"). For France, Besancenot explained, NATO is a purely military organization with relevance in two primary areas -- ensuring European

stability, as it does in Kosovo, and fighting the struggle against terrorism, as it does in Afghanistan. NATO's challenge, he said, was to separate NATO's essential functions from those which are superfluous to its core missions. For example, he said, focusing on humanitarian missions and partnerships with an ever-increasing number of countries and/or organizations would lead to exponential increases in the cost of running NATO and dilute its focus from what should be its primary goals. The NATO relief effort in Pakistan, he said (several times), was an example of a mission that did not serve NATO's interests, as it created expenses, strained the resources of member states (most specifically Spain), and did not serve NATO's broader goals. The Pakistan operation, he said, was, and must remain, the exception for NATO.

¶15. (C) Besancenot said that the French are truly invested in the NATO Response Force (NRF) and believe that it represents the future of NATO. In fact, Grand added, when the NRF model was first emerging several years ago, the MOD lobbied the French Presidency and achieved significant structural changes to the French military in support of the NRF. Besancenot said that while the U.S. has shown support for the NRF, this has not been comparable to the relatively massive investment offered by France. Furthermore, he said, notions that the NRF should be used as a "reserve force" or as a "cost saving measure" undermine its importance and discourage other allies from investing in the NRF. At some level, Besancenot said, there exists the perception that the U.S. is "above NATO" in many ways. He said the United States' limited support for the NRF was evidence of this. Grand claimed that, for the NATO Pakistan relief effort, the United States contributed rhetoric on the need for NATO involvement, but few tangibles, thereby furthering the notion that the U.S. will act outside of NATO when it pursues key important national interests.

¶16. (C) Besancenot said that the rotating force concept of force generation for the NRF created a situation that could unfairly strain the resources of individual member states. The Spanish, for example, had been "prisoners of the lottery" as they were forced to provide resources when the Pakistan relief effort was initiated. When events like this happen, he said, it creates a disincentive for countries to provide and employ forces and leaves the larger contributors feeling punished ("punishing the good students"). Common funding, he said, created such disincentives on several levels; it would make more sense to create mechanisms that would encourage states to contribute by rewarding providers. (COMMENT: The French have always maintained that force providers are punished by having to pay more than once, first when they generate their forces domestically and again when funding their contributions to NATO operations. This is an issue of concern as France debates the future of common funding. END COMMENT.)

¶17. (C) When Volker spoke of the benefits of having both political and military discussions at NATO, Besancenot replied that France was not averse to discussing some political issues within NATO, provided they were relevant. But using NATO as a forum to discuss Iran, for example, would only create more tensions, as the issue was being addressed in other, more relevant, fora.

MOD on Afghanistan Troop Reductions

¶18. (C) On the letters exchanged between the Secretary of Defense and Alliot-Marie on U.S. troop reductions in Afghanistan, Grand explained that Alliot-Marie's first letter was never intended to convey the message that the U.S. commitment was waning. He said France is well aware of U.S. contributions and that France, too, is invested in the success of Afghanistan. Instead, he said, the letters were meant to show the ambiguous, and potentially counterproductive, message that the U.S. was sending out: European countries, acting through NATO, were working on increasing their forces to take on more operations in

Afghanistan at the same time that the U.S. was announcing troop drawdowns. Volker explained that the U.S. was working towards a greater integration with ISAF that would ultimately culminate in the bulk of U.S. forces coming under ISAF control. This would result in a tighter command structure, but forces would have to shift and change as a result of the undertaking. Still, Grand said, the U.S. must pay attention to the timing. The announcement came only within a few days of the NATO announcement on expansion of ISAF, which was a bad move. He added that the U.S. announcement led to the perception that NATO was picking up the slack for a U.S. drawdown at the very moment the Netherlands deployment was being debated in Parliament.

19. (U) PDAS Volker did not have an opportunity to clear this message.

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